

# Evangelical Christianity and the Family

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## Abstract

*Evangelical Christians in Croatia and elsewhere in the world attempt to apply the principles of the Holy Scriptures in their daily lives, and their marriages and family lives are probably the most significant and most evident indicators of the success of that application. The first part of this article deals with the basics of biblical teaching on marriage and the family. In the second part, the stance of evangelical Christians is outlined on topics such as sexual immorality, especially regarding sexual intercourse before marriage and outside of marriage, as well as their attitude on homosexuality. In the last part of the article, the author offers biblical/theological guidelines for raising children and strengthening the family that include the establishment of living on the foundation of God's Word, the establishment of biblical authority in the marriage and family, as well as the establishment of family priorities.*

**Key words:** *Evangelical Christians, Holy Scripture, gospel, family, marriage, divorce, sexual intercourse, authority.*

## Introduction

Geoffrey W. Bromley writes, "It seems that the world is filled with books on marriage." If books on marriage could ensure a good marriage, no marriage in history could have been as good as today's marriages (Bromley, 1980: ix). North American evangelical Christians who serve as the greatest spiritual, theological and cultural influence on evangelical Christianity in Croatia have dedicated many books, articles, sermons, radio and TV programs, seminars and conferences to

marriage and family life.<sup>1</sup> It seems to me, however, that out of all of them, only a small number are grounded in the Word of God, while a great portion are anchored in modern theology, psychology, pedagogy and family counseling that springs out of those disciplines.

Although evangelical Christians in Croatia have contributed to the topic, and the oral, mainly conservative, theological tradition has been present in churches, there are only scarce written traces. Most of them are translations of works by foreign authors, especially American marriage counselors.

Among the evangelical churches in Croatia, not much has been written on marriage and the family, neither is there any exhaustive data about sermons on the topic.<sup>2</sup> Under the guidance of the local churches and denominations, occasional family conferences, premarital courses, and marriage and family seminars have taken place.

Evangelical Christianity in Croatia is still greatly influenced by global conservative evangelical Christianity, although the process of adopting Protestant liberal-theological stances, values and beliefs is more and more evident. The majority of evangelical Christians in Croatia take the Bible as the inerrable Word of God that provides reliable and applicable commands, instructions and guidelines for personal, spiritual and social issues.

A quick review of the works of some prominent Christian writers quickly reveals that most of them define or establish their theology of the family from other disciplines and orientations rather than from the Bible. Certainly this does not automatically devalue what they offer. It is important, however, to discern if that which they offer comes from the Holy Scriptures and whether it is in accordance with them, or if it is a product of the Christianized conclusions derived from personal understandings of secular disciplines. Much of what is popularly known as “Christian” or “biblical” was not derived from an exhaustive exegesis or study of the Holy Scriptures. Biblical understanding of the family and family relations radically changes the secular understanding of family relations. Although evangelical Christians in Croatia allege to the Reformation principle of “Scripture only,” they give insufficient attention to biblical principles in preparing

- 1 Books and teachings about marriage and the family, along with evangelistic and spiritually popular books, are the most popular and best sold world trade product of evangelical Christians from the USA. In Croatia, most of the books on marriage and the family from the evangelical perspective are translations of books edited in the USA.
- 2 Regarding the family and family life in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Croatia, there are several books and articles published by *Izvori* from Osijek, *Theological Institute* from Zagreb, and the *Evangelical Pentecostal Church “Good News”* from Split. Among the Baptists, there are several printing houses and associations which are involved in publishing. Only some of them steadily publish publications with family related topics.

for marriage, marital and family life, the raising of children, and care for the elderly. Biblical principles for living and functioning as a family in God's kingdom should be more studied and applied in the family setting. Although the Bible places a strong emphasis on teaching about the importance of marital unity, it does not make it more important than the other relationships in the kingdom of God (1 Co 7; Eph 5:22-33).<sup>3</sup> In the same way, blood relative relationships, such as father, mother, sister and brother do not replace fatherhood, motherhood, sisterhood and brotherhood in Jesus Christ (Deinhardt, Hirst, 88).

The difference between secular and biblical views of the family is radical. Jesus said this explicitly two thousand years ago. His question was, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" and the answer highlights this radical difference between the secular view and Jesus' view regarding the family. Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:48-50). Jesus makes the fulfillment of God's will the foundation, the center and the root of all relationships in marriage and family. The same Word by which Jesus created and sustains the universe, he also gave to the disciples to proclaim and to live by. That same Word, God's Word, has creative power, and when applied to the lives of a husband and wife as well as in the larger family, it accomplishes, changes, forms and supplements the character of every individual involved according to the character of Jesus Christ. A whole range of problems in marriage and the family emerge from a settled and faithfully nourished friendliness toward secular values and stands. God's Word, however, provides a warning to all including husbands, wives and children: "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (Jas 4:4). Furthermore the Word offers a way out of every human crisis, and this is especially so with the manifold crises of various levels and intensity in marriage and the family. James 4:7-8 directs, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." While many in marriage still seek for their wife or husband to submit to them, God instructs them to submit to him. While the spouses in a marriage resist each other, the Bible tells them to resist the devil together and he will flee from them. God's Word is very clear in urging every believer and nonbeliever to come near to him, promising that he will then come near to them. The more the people in a marriage and family draw near to God, the closer they become to each other and their common life becomes more productive and joyful, for God generates the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the heart

3 Bible quotations are taken from the NIV.

of every person; “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). What an irony! The very absence of these realities is the most frequent reason for divorce and family break-up. For every human problem, God offers his creative solution. The Psalmist points out, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps 119:105).

Through his own teaching, Jesus has shown that the community of faith has priority over the community of blood relatives. Jesus did not reject his earthly family, but instead asserted that the real members of the new family are all those who are united in obedience and in the fulfillment of the will of his father in heaven. Those are the people he ate with, walked with and shared his life with. Therefore, God’s family is our real family, for God has adopted us (Mt 23:9).

## **The Evangelical View of Marriage and the Family**

Christ’s work on the cross facilitates the realization of a godly family that is submitted to God and able to live according to God’s Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. But just as it was in biblical times when the family was like a battle field of the spirit, so has family life throughout history been very dynamic and reflected the spiritual state of the Christian community in different stages. Whenever the Israelite community departed from God, marriages with foreigners became a mark of the Israelite community, and the influences of the false gods could not be avoided (i.e. 1 Kings 16:31). So it was with the church. Whenever the church alienated herself from God and his Word, the church members applied secular principles to their lives generally, as well as in their marriage and family relationships. History marks repeated cycles of one generation who repents and the next who rebels. Instead of attracting the world into a unique family, God’s family is often being scattered into the world. Spiritual leaders throughout history, and even today, are often like Eli (1 Sam 2:22-36), Samuel (1 Sam 8:3.5) and David (i.e. 2 Sam 13:1-39); they serve God while watching their children alienate themselves from God. The transformation of family life is constant, and its quality depends on the intensity with which the family draws near to either God or the world.

Evangelical Christianity is rooted primarily in the gospels, the Word of God. Therefore, this article will focus primarily on the Holy Scriptures, and minimally on other works and church documents.

According to the *Leksikon evanđeoskoga kršćanstva* (*Dictionary of Evangelical Christianity*), marriage is an institution

“established by God before sin entered the world (Gen 1:26-31), a lifelong commitment between a man and woman (Mk 10:5-9; Mt 19:4-9) which includes

mutual sexual rights (1 Co 7:3-7). Marriage is the most influential social unit, which according to biblical standards, implies an unconditional, lifelong relationship of commitment between a man and a woman” (S. and Lj. Jambrek, 2007:74-79).

Only one’s relationship with God takes priority over the marriage relationship.

***Marriage is Established by God.*** The Bible reveals, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:18). The first woman was a “help” to the man, taken from him, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, his perfect complement (Gen 2:23). The husband and wife in a marriage relationship mutually share the blessings, benefits and responsibilities of the marriage.

***Marriage is Between a Man and a Woman.*** Biblical marriage is between a biological man and a biological woman. In the beginning God created “male and female” (Gen 1:27) and commanded them: “Be fruitful and increase in number” (v. 28). Natural reproduction is possible only through the union of a man and a woman. According to the Holy Scriptures, God “formed the man from the dust of the ground” (Gen 2:7) and “made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man” (v. 22). “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (v. 24). The marriage relationship has priority over all other human relationships, even the relationship between children and their parents. It is only in the context of this relationship that what it means to become one is noted, and it implies a place of fellowship (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:28; Gen 2:18-23). The marriage relationship needs to be comprised of the most intimate fellowship and unity with the purpose of glorifying God. Regarding marriage and family, article VI of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Application*<sup>4</sup> confirms “that the purpose of marriage is to glorify God and extend His Kingdom on earth in an institution that provides for chastity, companionship, procreation and Christian upbringing of children” (CSBA, VI).

As a specific relationship designed by God, biblical marriage implies holy unity in accordance with God’s law. By accepting the teaching of the Holy Scriptures on unity according to God’s law, millions of evangelical Christians globally have

4 The *Chicago Statement on Biblical Application* is the third and final statement in a trilogy of summits sponsored by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. Summit I (October 26-28, 1978) produced the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*. Summit II (November 10-13, 1982) resulted in the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*. Summit III (December 10-13, 1986) drafted the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Application*. The Chicago Statements were signed by hundreds of noted evangelical scholars (ICBI, [http://www.bmaboston.org/CC\\_Content\\_Page/0,,PTID307086|CHID750054|CIID,00.html](http://www.bmaboston.org/CC_Content_Page/0,,PTID307086|CHID750054|CIID,00.html)).

confirmed, as stated in the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Application*, “that since marriage is a sacred covenant under God uniting a man and a woman as one flesh, church and state should require faithfulness to God’s intention that it be a permanent bond” (CSBA, VI). Jesus said that nothing should break the bond and the union of a man and a woman. The marriage should be honored by all. That implies mutual faithfulness; “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Heb 13:4).

***Marriage Includes a Covenant Before God.*** Marriage is a covenant, a strong binding agreement made in the presence of God and people. It is a union established by the covenant of mutual promises. From the very beginning, this commitment is implied in the concept of a man leaving his parents and clinging to his wife. Marital covenant is most explicitly displayed by the prophet Malachi: “You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant” (Mal 2:14). Ezekiel applies the idea of marriage to the relationship between God and Israel.

“Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine” (Ezek 16:8).

From what is said, it can be seen that the husband has given his “solemn oath” to the woman and has entered a covenant that is never to be broken. The love implied here is a loyal love, one that keeps covenant, the love God shows to us even when we are not worthy of it.

The book of Proverbs also speaks about marriage as a “covenant” or mutual commitment. It condemns the adulteress “who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God” (Pr 2:17). These passages clearly show that marriage is not a regular covenant, but a covenant to which God is a witness. God is the one who has established the marriage and he is the witness to the mutual promises. They are literally made “before God.” Jesus said that it is God who binds two people together in a marriage, adding: “So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mt 19:6).

Marriage is an institution ordained by God for all people, not only for Christians. The book of Hebrews says that marriage should be “honored by all” (Heb 13:4). God preordained marriage equally for non-Christians as well as for Christians. He is witness to every wedding, which is a holy event, whether the married couple understands that or not. The biblical condemnation of adultery and extramarital relationships includes every type of marriage. It is necessary to

mention that homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27) and incest (1 Co 5:1-5) violate the intended purpose of sex.

***Marriage Includes Sexual Relations.*** The Scriptures clearly state that marriage includes sexual relations. It is called the unity of “one body”. God commanded the “male and female” he created to have children (Gen 1:28). That is possible only through the sexual union of a biological man and woman. When God created them and sent them out of Eden, this is exactly what happened: “Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain” (Gen 4:1). Speaking about sexual relations in marriage, the apostle Paul clearly states,

“But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife” (1 Co 7:2-4).

Sex is consecrated by God only within marriage (1 Co 7:2), and he condemns impurity and adultery (Heb 13:4). Marriage is a companionship (Mal 2:14), a union that represents much more than just a sexual relationship. It is also a social and spiritual, as well as a sexual union. Furthermore, the purpose of the sexual relationship is far greater than mere procreation. Sexual relationship in marriage has a four-fold purpose: procreation (Gen 1:28), unity (Gen 2:24), also pleasure, and as a means of expressing love within the marital union (Pr 5:18-19; 1 Co 7:2-5).

***Marriage is a Lifelong, Monogamous Union.*** Marriage is a permanent bond for one wife and one husband. God gave Adam only one wife; that is God’s idea and ideal for marriage. Paul writes that “each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband” (1 Co 7:2). About the marriage between one man and one woman (monogamy) it is not taught only in the New Testament, but rather, that practice is present from the very beginning, when God created one man (Adam) and gave him one woman (Eve) (Mt 19:5-6; Ex 20:14-17; Mt 5:28).<sup>5</sup>

The Bible is clear about the duration of marriage: it is a lifelong commitment. It is designed to last a lifetime, and not forever. The lifelong purpose of marriage

5 The Old Testament often mentions polygamy, that is, a marriage involving one man and multiple women. The Old Testament directly links polygamy with the consequences or the result of human sin, among which is the desire for numerous children, especially sons (Gen 16:1-16; 30:1-24) and the desire for demonstrating power and wealth (Jdg 8:30; 2 Sa 3:2-5; 5:13; 1 Ki 11:1-8). The first case of polygamy is noticed in Cain’s ancestry (Gen 4:19), but monogamy is still presented as an ideal (Ps 128:3; Pr 5:18; 31:10-29; Eccl 9:9). Jesus confirmed that monogamy was God’s ideal from the beginning (Mt 19:8).

is stretching in the context of the tenability of marriage, of which Jesus said: "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mt 19:6). Paul also asserted, "For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage" (Rom 7:2). These concepts underline the emphasized saying in the wedding ceremony: "Until death do us apart."

The Bible asserts that marriage is only a temporal institution. Although marriage is a lifelong covenant made before God, it does not extend into eternity: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Mt 19:8). Although we will undoubtedly be able to recognize our loved ones in heaven, marriage will not exist in heaven. Furthermore, the fact that widows can marry again (1 Co 7:8-9) gives an indication that their previous commitment was only until the death of their spouses. Paul considers that it is better for younger widows to remarry (1 Tim 5:10-14), but "only in the Lord" (1 Co 7:39).

**Divorce.** Although it is difficult to accept it, sometime Christians face a break up of their marriage. The reason for this lies in the fact that people do not keep God's standards for marriage, which ensure security and marital happiness. The Bible underlines that God hates divorce:

"You ask, 'Why?' It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the LORD Almighty. 'So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith'" (Mal 2:14-16).

Jesus said about marriage: "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mt 19:6). To avoid divorce, the Scriptures offer a range of other solutions for those believers who found their life on the word of God. The solution for a happy marriage is not a divorce, but instead, the submission of both the husband and the wife to Jesus Christ and to each other. This kind of relationship is described in the epistle to the Ephesians in 5:21-31.

The Mosaic Law allowed the release of a wife, but the husband was obligated to give her a certificate of divorce (Deut 24:1) in order to prevent an unjustified release. The certificate of divorce served as proof that she could marry another (Deut 24:1). When they confronted Jesus, the Pharisees were obviously in the wrong when they said that Moses had *commanded* every husband to give his wife



a certificate of divorce in the event of a divorce. Jesus told them that Moses only *permitted* them to do that, but not for just any reason, as was customary at that time (Mt 19:3,7-8).

Jesus prohibited divorce because it is in opposition to God's will and his Word (Mt 19:5-6; Mk 10:69). The apostle Paul strongly emphasizes,

"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife" (1 Co 7:10-11).

Although Paul noticed that Christians were divorcing, he commanded them to leave the possibility for reconciliation open. He prohibited the believers to initiate the divorce process in those cases where the partner was an unbeliever.

"To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?" (1 Co 7:12-16).

By this, Paul allows that the Christian cannot stop the unbelieving party who insists on divorce.

Jesus refers to marital unfaithfulness<sup>6</sup> as the only exception for a divorce: "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" (Mt 5:32; also see Mt 19:9). But this is permission, not a command.

Addressing the insolvability of marriage, Jesus pointed out: "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery." Some interpreters hold that in the Gospels according to Mark (10:11-12) and Luke (16:18), Jesus spoke about the people who get divorced from their spouses only to legalize their adulterous relationship with another person. Such is the case with Herod and Herodias who had divorced their spouses to satisfy their

6 Marital unfaithfulness (Greek: *porneia*) can include repeated acts of adultery, but usually implies a regular sexual impurity of any kind, before and/or after the wedding.

own lust (Mk 6:14.29; Mt 14:1-12). In light of the biblical view on marriage as the lifelong, lasting relationship of commitment (1 Co 7:10-11), we have to say, however, that both Jesus and Paul asserted that the believing spouse is not bound to the unbelieving party in cases where the unbeliever seeks a divorce (1 Co 7:12-16). Jesus knew how to treat people who felt guilt and failure (Lk 19:1-10; Jn 8:2-11; Jn 4:1-42). He did not diminish the guilt nor pass judgment, but instead offered redemption and help.<sup>7</sup>

**Marriage and Singleness as Equally Good Options.** Marriage is a personal choice, not an obligation. If someone enters into a marriage, he or she is obligated to be faithful and loyal to his or her spouse. If he or she, however, decides to stay single (not get married), then he or she should abstain from sexual unity (Mt 19:3-9; Mt 19:10-12). According to his own example, Paul considers that it is better for someone who wants to serve the Lord not to get married, although this requires a special gift (1 Co 7:7-9.32-35), an ability to resist fleshly temptations. As it can be seen from the text, the reason for this suggestion lies in the fact that the married person endeavors to please his or her spouse, while the unmarried endeavors to please the Lord (S. and Lj. Jambrek, 2007:77).

**Remarriage.** The Bible clearly states that after the death of one of the spouses, the other partner is free to remarry (Rom 7:2-3). Paul advises single people and widows to stay single if they can, and he advises the others to remarry (1 Co 7:8-9), i.e., young widows (1 Tim 5:10-14), but “he must belong to the Lord” (1 Co 7:39).

Remarrying of the divorced is a more complex issue. Opponents of the remarriage of the divorced quote the Gospel of Mark (10:11-12), the Gospel of Luke (16:18), as well as Romans (7:3) and 1 Corinthians (7:10-11). They interpret Jesus’ and Paul’s assertions as a teaching that the divorced live in adultery if they remarry. In such cases, many pastors refuse to remarry the divorced person.

Others take the phrase “except for marital unfaithfulness” (Mt 5:31-32 and 19:9), as a guideline for permitting divorce. There are others who claim that the Scriptures contain principles by which marriage of divorced people is a possible

7 Article VII of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Application* states: We affirm that since the essence of the marriage covenant is life-long commitment to the covenant partner, action in relation to a marital breakdown should at least initially aim at the reconciliation of the partners and restoration of the marriage. We affirm that God hates divorce, however motivated. We affirm that although God hates divorce, in a sinful world separation is sometimes advisable and divorce is sometimes inevitable. We affirm that God forgives repentant sinners, even those who have sinned by sundering their marriages. We affirm that the local church has the responsibility to discipline those who violate the biblical standards for marriage, compassionately restore those who repent, and faithfully minister God’s grace to those whose lives have been scarred by marital disruption.

option. Such are the biblical principles of forgiveness and restoration. However, Jesus is very explicit on the issue of divorce (Mt 5:27-28), and his strict view on divorce points out the ideal of marriage as a lifelong commitment.

***The Position of the Divorced and Remarried in the Church.*** In most evangelical churches, membership is open to newborn believers, including those who have been divorced and remarried before their conversion. The apostle Paul emphasized that converts of various positions, such as circumcised and slaves, should be accepted in their present situation at the moment of their conversion (1 Co 7:17-24). “Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.” God accepted the Gentiles in Cornelius’s house (Acts 10 and 11), and considering the frequency of divorce and remarriage among the Romans at that time, it is highly likely that there were such people in Cornelius’s house.

As a member of the Body of Christ, every believer in the church can serve with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the common benefit because the Holy Spirit has gifted each one for that purpose (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Co 12:11; Eph 4:16). As for the ministry of an elder or a deacon, however, only a person that meets the biblical precondition to be “the husband of but one wife” (1 Ti 3:2.12) can qualify.<sup>8</sup> A candidate for the ministry of elder or deacon can only be a person that lives faithfully in a marriage where neither of the spouses has been previously divorced, except in cases where the divorce took place before conversion (2 Co 5:17). The Bible sets specific standards for the ministry of an elder or deacon (1 Tim 3:12; Tit 1:5-9). The precondition to be a husband of but one wife is in accordance with the precondition to have a good reputation with outsiders.

***Preparing for Marriage.*** Christians should prepare for marriage on the foundation of God’s Word and marry only other Christians. The apostle Paul clearly states that Christians should enter into marriage with other Christians, or in other words “he must belong to the Lord” (1 Co 7:39), and he is openly against the uniting of a believer under the same yoke with an unbeliever (2 Co 6:14).<sup>9</sup> He is very clear, comparing such a bond with light and darkness. Since it

8 Some hold that this claim implies polygamy. But, according to historical sources, polygamy was not a common practice at that time, while divorces and remarriages among both the gentiles and the Jews were frequent.

9 Over history the term Christian has lost its original meaning of Christ’s disciple or follower. The Apostle Paul’s term “in the Lord” is more adequate. The Mennonite Confession of Faith of 1617 sums it up excellently: “And, as Christ accepts none as His bride and a member of His body, but those alone who are united with Him by faith, so also, believers cannot sever their bodies which are sanctified and surrendered to God, as members of Christ and temples of the Holy Ghost from Christ, and unite them in marriage with the unregenerate, and thus be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, who are not known to the church, by faith and

happens, anyway, that Christians do get married to nonbelievers, God offers a solution for those who circumvent his law, without demanding that they leave their unbelieving partner. If married to an unbeliever, the believer is obligated to submit to God more than to the unbelieving spouse (Mt 10:37; Lk 9:59-62), that is, to be more loyal to God and raise the children according to God's standards (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14-15), trying, at the same time, to win the unbeliever for God (1 Co 7:12-16; 1 Pet 3:1-12) (S. and Lj. Jambrek, 2007:76).

***The Roles of the Husband and Wife in Marriage and the Family.*** By entering into marriage, the husband and wife become one. They should equally promote and uplift their spouse as for their own maturing in the Lord. The roles of the husband and wife can be perceived by contemplating the relationship between Christ and the Church. The husband and wife complement each other with their roles in marriage and the family.

The husband is the one who provides security in the marriage and the family (Eph 5:25); he is a leader<sup>10</sup> (1 Co 11:3), he provides life's necessities (1 Tim 5:8), he is an example of God's heart (Mt 6:14-15; Mk 16:17-18; 10:44), a protector (1 Co 7:3-5), an example of God's sovereignty (2 Co 10:5-6) as well as an intercessor and a warrior (Jas 5:16). The *Chicago Statement on Biblical Application* asserts that "the husband as head is the loving servant-leader of his wife, and the wife as helper in submissive companionship is a full partner with her husband" (CSBA, VI).

The wife provides support to the husband (1 Pet 3:1-2); she is his helper (Pr 31:10-12), she cares for him (Pr 31:13-27), she is a reflection of God's love (Jn 13:35), a follower (1 Pet 3:4-6), a reflection of God's creativity (Tit 2:3-5) and an intercessor (Eph 6:18).

***Raising and Caring for the Children in the Family.*** A current trend in Croatia is for families to attempt to transfer the care and responsibility for the raising of

Christian baptism, as brethren or sisters, in fellowship, seeing that baptism is the first Christian ordinance in the church, after which all other ordinances of God follow (Ephesians 5:30; Galatians 3:26)." The Westminster Confession of the Faith from 1647/8, which has a strong influence on evangelical Christianity globally and in Croatia, asserts that "It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And therefore such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies" (XXIV,3).

- 10 The leaders in the home and society were mainly men, but there are some exceptions: Debra was a judge (Jdg 4-5); Lydia was a trader (Ac 16:14); Priscilla and Aquila taught together (Ac 18:18) in their home where the church regularly met (Rom 16:3-5; 1 Co 16:19). We also have the song about the wife of noble character in the Proverbs who was creative and had business abilities (Pr 31:16-20).

their children over to the government and/or church educational institutions. Although church and government institutions try to carry out this highly significant educational task, they fail to succeed. According to the Scriptures, they will not be able to succeed in spite of great will and efforts, for God gave this task to the parents, and it is to be accomplished within the family. Evangelical Christians globally have embraced the teaching of the Scriptures as confirmed by the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Application* when it says that “loving nurture and discipline of children is a God-ordained duty of parents, and God-ordained obedience to parents is a duty of children” (CSBA, VI). The church, however, has a responsibility to nourish the family.

Quality marriage provides a solid basis for quality family. Marriage based on the Word of God can generate a family that will worship God and live according to his standards. The parents should train and raise their children with love, according to God’s Word:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD your God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deut 6:4-9).

Instructing and raising children (Pr 13:24) in the Word of God should be for the benefit of the family and the nation (Deut 6:2-3, 24-25). Children should be raised, disciplined and taught in the faith and knowledge of the Scriptures in order for them to be able to separate emotionally from their parents. They also need to be able to decide independently whether or not to accept faith in Jesus Christ and build a relationship with him (Gen 2:24). Children should be taught to honor their father and mother (Deut 5:16).

Jesus grew up in a home where the relationship between the parents and children was nourished in accordance to what was expected from the family in the Old Testament. His parents successfully passed the faith to him: the religious leaders were amazed by his knowledge (Lk 2:47). Jesus separated from his parents (Mk 3:31) and showed them respect (Lk 2:51).

God has given parents authority over their children, which includes training them in the faith and protecting them spiritually. Parental authority is neither absolute nor permanent. It is founded in God’s Word and subject to his Word. Parents have a God-established authority over their children until their son or daughter gets married. By entering into a marriage, the son receives from the Lord an authority for his own marriage and family, and the daughter embraces the authority of her husband.

***Relationship of the Parents toward their Children and of the Children toward their Parents.*** Children are a priceless gift from God. They are given to parents who are to love, honor, raise and care for them. Likewise, God gave children the responsibility to honor and respect their parents, care for them, listen to them and obey (Eph 6:1-3). Parents, especially fathers, have a God-given responsibility to love their children, demonstrate mature Christian conduct by personal example, care for their needs, teach them and “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). King Solomon said, “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (Pr 1:8-9). And also:

“Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. When I was a boy in my father’s house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, he taught me and said, ‘Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you’” (Pr 4:1-6).

Parents should spend time with their children. Children will always find time for their parents, and parents should set time daily to listen to their children and discuss whatever they want to talk about. Listening to the children opens the door to effective instruction in the Word of God.

Christians should learn how to keep a good balance between their various obligations, be they personal, job-related, friendship-related or familial. It is not good to neglect the family on account of a job. Ministering to the family should have priority over ministering in the church. Neglect of the family, especially by ministers, can lead children to neglect God and his church because they may conclude that God and the church take their parents away from them (S. and Lj. Jambrek, 2005).

Fathers and pastors of home churches should make sure the family stays on God’s path; point to areas where correction is necessary and combine admonition with love and encouragement. They ought to provide all that is necessary for life together and devotion, for, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8). The father should use daily opportunities to instruct his children in the Word of God (Deut 6:6-9), set up a time for teaching his children (Pr 4:1-2), gather his family for prayer and worship, as well as to gather them for corporate study of the Bible. The goal of the parents is to help each child to come to salvation and fullness of the Spirit by teaching and establishing them in the Word of God.

## **The Evangelical Christian View on Sexual Immorality**

It should be pointed out that the Bible, and branches of Christianity rooted in the Bible, condemn every form of sexual immorality. If marriage is the basic unit of each society, and the stability of society depends on the stability of marriage and the family, then it should be emphasized that every sexual sin undermines the foundation of family life and the unity of the marital relationship, and so society itself. This is a serious issue and, although all sins are pardonable (Mt 21:31-32; Lk 7:36-50; Jn 4:1-42; 8:2-11), there is no justification for them because their damage cannot be restored. Through forgiveness, God offers a new beginning, although the horrible consequences often leave an indelible mark on the broken marital covenant which had relied on the mutual fidelity of the spouses. In 2 Samuel 12-19, we see the devastating consequences of David's adultery. As Christians, we are invited to help everyone to try to live according to God's commands, including those who fall into the sin of adultery or become victims of marital infidelity (Gal 6:1). As in every other area of Christian living, Christians should resist temptations, including those of a sexual nature, and they should be careful to avoid falling into habitual sin (1 Co 5:1-13; 6:12-20).

***A View on Sexual Relations before and Outside of Marriage.*** Sexual relations are a gift from God intended for husbands and wives to enjoy, and they are blessed exclusively within marriage. The marriage bed should be kept pure (Heb 13:4), and men and women are created, as well as called, to refrain from sexual relations before and outside of marriage. Human sexuality affects the human relationship with God, self and other people. Sex before and outside of marriage is a sin that pollutes the person and separates him or her from God. This sin destroys a human's relationship with God and makes room for the devil to steal the blessings God intended for him or her to have. Furthermore, it is very possible to get sexually transmitted diseases which can have lasting consequences on the life of that person and/or the whole family (Jambrek, 2007).

Sex before marriage influences relationships with other people. First, sex outside of marriage destroys the relationships of the persons involved in it. It is a matter of trust. If a young man and woman do not sufficiently appreciate the sexual relationship and do not wish to wait for the making of a marital covenant, how will they be able to trust each other once in the marriage? Trust and respect for one another can be built by resisting temptation and by practicing self-control. Second, if a person does not bring sexual purity into a marriage, their previous experiences can have a tremendous negative influence on their relationship in the marriage. There is a constant thoughtful comparison of sexual partners. A doubt is introduced that intimacy and moral purity are not sufficiently important

to the other person. Third, sexual sin separates the Christian not only from God, but also from people that carefully observe his or her life. It is impossible to hide a sin; it becomes an invisible obstacle in the relationships of believers and a tremendous obstacle in proclaiming the gospel to those who do not yet believe God (Jambrek, 2007).

Sex can be to the glory of God and the completion of his image in a person, but it can also destroy a person and serve as a means to sin which can bring tremendous damage to a person and his or her loved ones (1 Co 6:19-20). The Bible calls every sexual relationship before marriage a sin, including the sexual relations of a young man and woman who want to get married, but are not yet married. Evangelical marriage is legitimate only after a man and woman enter into a marital covenant before God and the Church. Deviant unions of people, such as common law marriages, cohabitations, homosexual marriages, etc., are considered sinful according to Scripture and are in opposition to God's Law. God's punishment will affect every person, as well as every church and state, that tolerates, encourages and legitimizes this sin (cf. Gen 19:1-22).

***A View on Homosexuality and So-called Homosexual Marriages.*** God ordained that sex should be practiced in the context of a monogamous heterosexual relationship (Gen 1:27-28; 2:24; Pr 20:14.17; Heb 13:4). The Bible speaks clearly and explicitly against homosexual practices. In the Old Testament, homosexuality is considered a mortal sin (Lev 18:21-25.29), and the New Testament considers it to be the basis for exclusion from the church (excommunication) (1 Co 5). The apostle Paul announced that no homosexual will inherit the kingdom of God, and also adds that there were such people who God delivered from their homosexuality the same way he delivered thieves from an urge to steal, drunkards from alcohol, and the sexually immoral from immorality (1 Co 6:9-11). Homosexual practices are called unnatural, impure, indecent, perverse and detestable (cf. Rom 1:24-27; Ezek 16:50).

Norman Geisler (2005), the most received and influential expert on ethics both globally and among Croatian evangelical Christians, points out that there are strong social arguments in addition to the explicit biblical instructions against homosexuality. He considers that no society, whether past or present, has ever granted equal status for homosexuals. Not only is homosexuality psychologically and socially dangerous, but it has become an epidemiological threat to the lives of millions of people. Therefore, it is necessary that rational societies protect their citizens from the infectious influence of such sexually deviant behavior. Evangelical Christians believe they should love the person (the homosexual sinner) although they hate the sin they practice (homosexuality). The churches, therefore, encourage their members to extend love in order to win homosexuals for Christ who loves them, died for them and who can deliver them from



homosexuality.<sup>11</sup>

The so-called homosexual marriage is not a biblically based marriage, but rather an explicitly sexual relationship in which the partners abide in sin which will keep them from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Co 6:9-11). Since it is not a legitimate marriage, it follows that neither is the breaking of such a relationship a real divorce. It is important to mention that just as God forgives the sins of those who confess them and repent before him, God also delivers homosexuals who call upon him from the power and the bond of homosexuality. So also should the church forgive those whom God has forgiven, and accept into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit those whom God has delivered from the powers of sin, rebirthing them into new life.

### **Biblical-Theological Guidelines for Raising Children and Strengthening Marriage and the Family**

***Establishing Life on the Foundations of God's Word.*** It is important for every family, especially a Christian family, to live on the foundation of God's Word and to act by the word and the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, marital and family life should become a lifelong process of learning from the Word of God. The goal of the family is that every member develops a good relationship with God, for this is a prerequisite for a good relationship with each member of the family. The

- 11 Article VIII of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Application* states: "We affirm that Scripture reveals God's standards for sexual relationships, deviation from which is sinful. We affirm that sexual intercourse is legitimate only in a heterosexual marriage relationship. We affirm that God's grace in Christ can deliver men and women from bondage to deviant sexual practice, be they heterosexual or homosexual, and the church must assume responsibility for restoring such members to a life that honors God. We affirm that God loves homosexuals as well as other sinners, and that homosexual temptations can be resisted in the power of Christ to the glory of His grace, just as other temptations can. We affirm that Christians must exercise a compassion, kindness, and forgiveness in the ministry of God's grace to those whose lives have been scarred by sexual deviations. We affirm that human fulfillment does not depend on satisfying sexual drives; hedonism and related philosophies encouraging promiscuous sexuality are wrong and lead to ruin. We affirm that pornography threatens the well-being of individuals, families, and entire societies, and that it is incumbent upon Christians to seek to check its production and distribution. We deny that homosexual practice can ever please God. We deny that heredity, childhood conditioning, or other environmental influences can excuse deviant sexual behavior. We deny that the sexual molestation or exploitation of children in general and incestuous relationships in particular can ever be justified. We deny that it is hopeless to look for deliverance from homosexual practices or other forms of sexual deviancy. We deny that the healing of sexual deviancy is aided by condemnation without compassion or by compassion without the application of Scriptural truth, in confident hope."

Bible points out that those whose way is undefiled are blessed, those who walk in accordance to God's law! "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways" (Ps 119:1-3). The Holy Scriptures, as the Word of God, contain precise instructions and powerful solutions for every of life's situations and issues. The gospel is God's power for the salvation of all who believe (Rom 1:16). Taking into consideration the whole witness of Scripture, we can certainly say that it is God's power for the salvation of marriages of all those who believe as well as for the salvation of families of those who believe. It is important to pervade marriage and the family with the gospel.

In the process of pervading marriage and the family with the gospel, the husband and father of the family plays a key role. God has given him authority and the task of establishing his own life on the Word of God, and then also the lives of his wife and children.

***Establishing Biblical Authority in Marriage and the Family.*** There have been numerous discussions regarding authority in marriage and in the family. They are often intense discussions in society and in the church. God's authority is often misunderstood within the family and sometimes substituted by the authority of the patriarch, where the husband commands and the wife and children unreservedly obey his commands and wishes. Without getting into an evaluation and analysis of the definition and interpretation of authority, I introduce here a (personal) understanding of biblical authority in marriage and the family.

Authority is a given dominion and power. God's authority is a dominion and power received by God. The Bible asserts that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of every man, the husband is the head of his wife, and parents have authority over their children (1 Co 11:3; Eph 5:22). By applying this order of authority to the family, every Christian should govern his home by God's authority. This principle is applicable if the person in the place of authority is faithful to God. If that is not the case, then said person should be obeyed only in that which is in accordance with God's Word: "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29). If the husband is an unbeliever, the wife establishes authority directly with God and she is responsible for raising the children and protecting the home.

God's authority depends on God's presence in the life of the believer and on the believer's obedience to God's Word. Therefore, God's authority manifests itself in the believer's life, job, marriage, family, and church. What does God's authority imply?

Authority in marriage and the family implies: 1) responsibility for establishing a home in which God dwells; 2) responsibility for blessing in the home; 3)

responsibility for proclaiming God's Word in the home and living by it in all of life's situations; 4) protection of the home through prayer against the attacks of the evil one; 5) raising of the children in an atmosphere of God's Word; and 6) providing for the spiritual and material needs of the family.

God ordained the husband as the head of the family, an authority over his wife. In that sense, the wife should submit to her husband. According to the concept of the modern democratic marriage, the equality of a husband and wife is strongly emphasized in everything, including authority. By embracing secular concepts of marriage and family life, evangelical Christians directly oppose the Word of God, that is, God himself. Christians should, rather, incline toward mutual submissiveness in love as an ideal (Eph 5:21), believing at the same time that the husband has special leadership responsibilities given by God (cf. Eph 5:21-32; Col 3:18-19; and 1 Pet 3:1-7). There are some adherents to the strong authority of the husband (1 Co 14:34-35; 1 Ti 2:11-14), but this does not mean dictatorship, rather a responsible leadership of the family in accordance to God's commands. On the other hand, God requires the wife to submit to her husband (Eph 5:24; Col 3:19) and respect him (Eph 5:33). This does not mean that God has put the wife in a lower position, rather he provides her with protection (Lk 8:1-3; 10:38-42; Jn 4:7-30). The exhortation to mutual submissiveness (Eph 5:21) applies to all relationships in the church (Eph 5:25-6:10) including Christian marriage (Eph 21-33). The subject of submissiveness in marriage is unjustifiably unpopular since the Bible talks about a voluntary submissiveness within a loving relationship, and not of the imposition of one's will upon another (Eph 5:21-22.24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1). The husband is a head who does not govern by his own, instead he follows the unselfish example of Christ (Eph 5:23.25.28-30; Phil 2:1-11; Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7).

***Establishing Family Priorities.*** All believers, especially church elders and pastors, should establish priorities in their lives on the basis of biblical teaching. When asked by the Pharisee who was a teacher of the Law: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Mt 22:36-40).

Jesus asserted that the love for and relationship with God have priority over all, and after that comes the love for one another.

Evangelical Christians incline toward setting their priorities according to their importance in relation to eternity. First on the scale of priorities for both the individual, as well as the marital and family unions, is relationship with God.

Second is unity with a spouse. Humans were created for fellowship. It is not good for a man to be alone, therefore God presented him a woman for companionship and help (cf. Gen 2:18). Then God blessed them and commanded them: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen 1:28). Therefore the family is third in the order of authority. Ministering in the church is only just fourth in the order of authority.<sup>12</sup>

Every member in the family learns how to function in God's authority. Therefore, a godly, earnest and blessed home and submissive children serve as an indicator of God's dwelling with the believer, who should be able to establish an order of priority as follows: God, spouse, children, church, friends and relatives, society, etc.

## Conclusion

The Christian family in Croatia today is in a whirlwind of different influences that promote family life. The tradition and theology of the Catholic Church are present on a large scale among the common people. Evangelical Christians hold on to conservative evangelical theology and practices, but liberal theological, psychological and humanistic theories and practices are increasingly evident. Mass media, which is very influential in all classes of society, openly promote unbiblical and deviant ways of life.

Families who claim to be evangelical Christians in the broader social community must continuously harmonize their beliefs, their lives and actions in accordance to the Scriptures. This requires a repeated acceptance of biblical standards in all areas of life and function. The family needs to be constantly encouraged toward love and good works. If we want to show the world an example of marriage according to biblical principles and standards, then along with all the prerequisites for godly and holy living, the following admonition also applies: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col 3:23).

12 Ministering in the family always comes before ministering in the church. Moreover, it is a prerequisite for ministry as an elder that the candidate "must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim 3:4-5). Therefore, every pastor must manage his home well and have obedient children, because the family should function as a small church (cf. Mt 18:20).

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Translated by Ljubinka Jambrek

## **Evandeosko kršćanstvo i obitelj**

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